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HAPPINESS AT LAST

COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

J. L. SHUTE and
BEULAH KING

Fitzgerald Publishing Corporation
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DICK & FITZGERALD

SOME NEW PLAYS

★**MOLLY BAWN. 35 cents.** A comedy drama in 4 acts, by MARIE DORAN. 7 male, 4 female characters (or by doubling, 5 male and 3 female). Time, about 2 hours. Based upon incidents from a story by "The Duchess." The story is woven about Eleanor Masserene (*Molly Bawn*), whose mother eloped with a young Irishman, which has so embittered her grandfather that he disinherited her. After many years of loneliness he sends for *Molly*. How the coquettish heiress wins the hard, old man, is worked out in the play sometimes in a comedy setting and again in strong dramatic tenseness. \$10.00 royalty per performance by amateurs.

★**UNACQUAINTED WITH WORK; or, Married in Thirty Days. 25 cents.** A comedy in 5 acts, by O. E. YOUNG. 6 male, 6 female characters. 1 interior scene. Time, 2 hours. *Charles Chester*, a young man of leisure, succeeds in running up several bills. At last his landlord, *Jacob Sharp*, threatens to imprison him unless his board bill is paid. His aunt's promise to help him out for the last time if he marries within thirty days forces him to propose to every girl he meets, which naturally gets him into more trouble. Through his effort to get out of the tangle many funny situations arise. Among the characters are a very funny chambermaid and her sweetheart, a darkey cook, a comical bellhop, a clever detective, etc.

★**WAIT AND SEE. 25 cents.** A comedy-drama in 3 acts, by HELEN C. CLIFFORD. 7 males, 7 females. 1 easy interior. Time, 1½ hours. At a week end party one of the guests endeavors to purloin an important document, compelling a girl over whom he believes he has control to assist him. While they are trying to open the safe they are discovered by the butler who proves to be an old trusted retainer of the girl's father. Although the man tries to fasten the guilt upon the butler and the girl, he is unsuccessful and a happy climax is reached. Among others it has an excellent soubrette role.

★**WIVES ON A STRIKE. 25 cents.** A comedy in 3 acts, by LILLIAN SUTTON PELÉE. 6 male, 7 or more female characters. Time, 3 hours. 3 interior scenes. Costumes varied. At a meeting of the Wives Welfare Club, it is decided to "go on Strike" and *Jane Spink* is to make the test case. The wives' grievances greatly amuse *Betty*, a bride of 30 days, who boasts of her husband's angelic qualities. Her first offence of having supper late causes such a row that *Betty* also decides to "go on strike." *Betty's* scheme to make her husband change his set ideas about woman's rights is the cause of all the mix-up. How the strike is won and the husbands taken back is cleverly depicted in the play. A parrot who swears at the right moment adds to the funny situations.

★**HIS SISTERS. 25 cents.** A farce in 1 act; by BEULAH KING. 1 male, and 8 female characters; or 9 female characters as the male may easily be impersonated by a female character. 1 interior. Time, 30 minutes. Three sisters, who adore their handsome older brother, secretly plot to have him marry their particular friends. How their plans are all upset and matters finally smoothed out is cleverly told in this play.

★**SUITED AT LAST. 25 cents.** A sketch in 1 act, by ELIZABETH URQUHART. 7 females and a discharged soldier. 1 interior. Time, about 40 minutes. *Dorothy*, a newly-wed wife, is in search of a cook; her mother, her chum, her Aunt Jane give much advice as to how she shall interview the various applicants, in fact, so much so, that *Dorothy* is utterly confused and finally engages just what her husband has advised from the beginning.

★**ENCORES AND EXTRAS. 35 cents.** A collection of short monologues suitable particularly for encores, but are available for any occasion to fill in for a few minutes; contains black-face, Hebrew, a fond mother, a rube monologue, etc.

★**GORGEOUS CECILE. The. 25 cents.** A comedy in 3 acts, by BEULAH KING. 4 male, 5 female characters. 1 interior. Time, 2 hours. Max, the son of a wealthy widower, notwithstanding the schemes of his father and aunts, has remained obdurate to all of their matrimonial plans. Upon his return home for a visit, he finds, as usual, a girl whom it is hoped will subjugate him, but the hopes are frustrated, as it is "The Gorgeous Cecile" to whom he turns. The parts are all good and well contrasted, with sparkling dialogue and plenty of action.

★**MADAME G. WHILIKENS' BEAUTY PARLOR. 25 cents.** An original entertainment in 2 acts, by VIOLA GARDNER BROWN, for 12 (or less) female characters. 1 interior scene. Time if played straight about 50 minutes. A very comical travesty on a beauty parlor during a busy day. Introducing among others, French, Irish, colored, rube character, two salesladies, all strongly contrasted.

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A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

By
JAMES L. SHUTE
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NOTE.—The professional acting and moving picture rights of this play are expressly reserved by the Publishers, to whom theatrical managers who wish to produce it should apply. Amateur representation may be made without such application and without charge.

Happiness at Last

CHARACTERS

MRS. MANNERS.....	<i>A widow</i>
MARY ANDREWS }	<i>Her nieces</i>
LAVINIA ANDREWS }	
ESTHER RICHARDS.....	<i>A secretary</i>
SUSAN.....	<i>A maid</i>
JOHN PRICE.....	<i>Mrs. Manners' brother</i>
STEVEN CARTERET.....	<i>John's friend</i>
PAUL WEBSTER.....	<i>A suitor</i>
MAJOR DANIEL BRISTOW.....	<i>An old suitor</i>

TIME:—The other day. LOCALITY:—Any suburb.

TIME OF PLAYING:—One hour and a half.

SCENE

Living-room of John Price's country home. Same scene throughout.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

MRS. MANNERS. A tall, slender, languid woman of about 50, but made up to appear 35. Her worst faults are her desire for admiration and her persistence in clinging to the thirties. She is well gowned throughout the play. In ACT III she looks more like 50 than 35.

MARY ANDREWS. A beautiful young girl of about 22. She is well dressed, but not too elaborate.

LAVINIA ANDREWS. On first appearance she is plainly dressed, spectacled and grim, but only twenty, which proves she can be successfully taught much; her hair is short and straight. On second appearance she wears a pretty gown, hair curled and looks very stylish.

ESTHER RICHARDS. About 25, and an able secretary and capable of making a charming wife. Wears very neat dresses throughout.

SUSAN. About 18, wears the regular maid's costume.

STEVEN CARTERET. About 28. Any description of youth would apply to him as he is the incarnation of that spirit.

PAUL. About 25. He is just the nicest sort of a chap, uninteresting of course, but lovable.

MAJOR BRISTOW. About 50. He has been a brave soldier in his day, but the companionship of Mrs. Manners has made him a dapper gentleman.

JOHN PRICE. About 38. A normal sort of genius, good looking and kind.

The male characters wear suits suitable to the time of day and character, as no extraordinary costumes are required.

INCIDENTAL PROPERTIES

Shorthand book, pad and pencil for MARY.

Several handboxes and a glass of water for SUSAN.

Fan for MRS. MANNERS.

Cigarettes for CARTERET.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means right hand; L., left hand; c., center of stage; D. L., door at left; C. D., center door in rear wall; R. E., entrance at right. UP means toward back of stage; DOWN, toward footlights.

Happiness at Last

ACT I

SCENE.—*Living-room in JOHN PRICE'S country home. Late afternoon. Door in C. of rear wall; this door is arched and extremely tall with a curtain daring in color and pattern. Decorative panels in rear wall on each side of C. D. If convenient, beyond the door is seen a hallway done in much the same style with an effective composition of a table, a bit of batick and a bust. The floor of both rooms is of black and white tiles resembling a huge checker-board. The furniture is of the most modern school and is quite unique. There are peculiarly shaped benches under each panel. DOWN L. is a day-bed heaped with cushions. DOWN R. is a table with quill pen, ink, paper, books, etc. Telephone wherever convenient. Near table is a chair and one or two others are placed at artistically effective points. In R. wall is a tall French window through which may be seen flower boxes and a bit of blue sky. This can be used as R. E. (right entrance). If impracticable, a plain window, showing flowers, etc., can be placed UP R. and a door DOWN R. which can be used as the R. E. to and from the garden. Door in L. wall leading to another part of the house. If practicable, there should be a rise of two steps between the hall and the living-room to lend effect to the grouping of the characters. This scenery can be simplified or elaborated to suit circumstances. DISCOVERED, MARY at table bent over a shorthand book, pad and pencil. PAUL is standing near her.*

MARY. I'm on page twenty, Paul, and there are only fifty pages in the book.

PAUL. I suppose I ought to congratulate you.

MARY (*smiling*). Of course I don't expect it after the way you've fought against my business career.

PAUL. I haven't said much these last months.

MARY (*rising*). That's true. (*Suddenly*) Why, you haven't even proposed to me for weeks and weeks!

PAUL. After a fellow's been refused twenty times——

MARY. I know, and I'm glad you're taking a sensible view at last. (*Slyly*) Some day I'm going to find a wonderful girl for you.

ENTER SUSAN C. D., *carrying handboxes; crosses and*
EXITS D. L.

PAUL. Again! Has she the habit?

MARY. Poor thing! You seldom see her without a handbox! (*Sighs*) Auntie's extravagance! It—it is deplorable!

ENTER MRS. MANNERS, LAVINIA and MAJOR BRISTOW
R. E.

MRS. MANNERS. Did you see that man *stare* at me?

LAVINIA (*shortly*). No. (*Goes to table, chooses book and sits on day-bed*)

PAUL. Good evening, Mrs. Manners!

MRS. MANNERS (*offering hand*). My dear Paul, I didn't notice you when I came in. To tell the truth I didn't notice anyone. I was annoyed by that man's staring at me.

BRISTOW. If one will be beautiful one must suffer the consequences.

LAVINIA. What rot!

BRISTOW. Lavinia has no use for that rare and evasive god, Beauty.

LAVINIA. Do you blame me? Would you, if he had treated you the way he has me?

MRS. MANNERS (*going to bench*). Perhaps if you paid a little more attention to him he would be kinder to you.

LAVINIA. I doubt it. (*Her nose back in the book*)

PAUL. I say, Mary, come out in the garden for a stroll.

MARY. I'm not in the mood for a garden to-night.

MRS. MANNERS (*languidly*). Mary's so queer. One would think she would like a stroll in the garden with a nice young man. I don't know what will become of her.

MARY. I do. (BRISTOW *smokes*)

MRS. MANNERS (*with sarcasm*). It's well to know what you want and work for it.

PAUL (*grimly*). It is.

BRISTOW. You sound disheartened, young man.

PAUL. I see no hope of getting what I want.

BRISTOW. That so? What's the trouble?

PAUL. Too many others want the same thing.

BRISTOW. That's what makes the struggle worth while. Go to it and beat 'em.

MRS. MANNERS. Excellent advice, Major. (LAVINIA *gives a guffaw*)

LAVINIA (*mischievously*). Why not follow it, Major?

MRS. MANNERS (*looking over her fan coyly at BRISTOW*). My dear child!

MARY. I've decided on my life-work. (PAUL *groans*)

BRISTOW. What is it?

MARY. I'm going to be secretary to a great man.

PAUL. I don't approve of women in business.

MARY. You would, if you were a business man.

MRS. MANNERS. Oh dear. You'll have wrinkles before you're thirty and a scowl between your eyes and wear orthopedic shoes.

MARY. But if I remain a parasite I'll develop crabbedness and flabbiness.

MRS. MANNERS. Esther has put these ideas in your head. I don't know what the girls are coming to for my part.

LAVINIA (*suddenly*). Uncle John's finished his second act.

MRS. MANNERS. Has he? I haven't dared ask him about it. He's so temperamental.

LAVINIA (*proudly*). I've read it.

MRS. MANNERS. Oh dear, I hope it isn't about love.

LAVINIA. It is. It's the mushiest thing.

BRISTOW. Good lord! that's not like John.

MRS. MANNERS (*anxious*). You don't think he's in love, do you?

BRISTOW. I don't know. One never can tell.

MRS. MANNERS (*going to MARY*). Mary, do you think your Uncle John is in love?

MARY. I shouldn't wonder.

MRS. MANNERS. Oh, you have upset me terribly—He doesn't *act* as if he were in love.

BRISTOW. Then you can depend upon it, he is.

MRS. MANNERS (*to herself*). He hasn't shown a sign of it.

BRISTOW. Well. Now look at me. Would you think I was desperately and hopelessly in love?

MARY (*laughing*). You—you are always in love.

MRS. MANNERS (*going back to bench*). Dear me, this is interesting. Who is she?

BRISTOW (*embarrassed*). I'm going to tell you some day.

MRS. MANNERS (*foolishly*). Anyone I know?

BRISTOW. You know her very well.

MRS. MANNERS. Is she in this room?

BRISTOW. She is.

LAVINIA. It's between you and Mary, Auntie. (*Mischievous wink*) And it's Mary, of course—undeniably, irrevocably and indisputably Mary!

BRISTOW. I haven't committed myself.

LAVINIA. No, but Mary has "committed" you by being in the room.

MRS. MANNERS. I'm sure you are a bit hasty. It isn't always Mary, you know.

LAVINIA. I never knew the time when it wasn't.

MRS. MANNERS. My dear Lavinia, you are so unobserving.

MARY (*disgusted with it all*). Major, you haven't said how you liked my new gown.

BRISTOW. I like it, my dear. (*In fatherly tones*) I always like everything about you. (MRS. MANNERS is now convinced)

MRS. MANNERS (*going to MAJOR and taking his arm*). Come, let's have our fox trot.

BRISTOW. Certainly if you wish.

MRS. MANNERS. I do and you, dear Major, always respect my wishes. (*Aware she scored a point*)

[EXIT BRISTOW and MRS. MANNERS C. D. arm in arm

MARY (*going to LAVINIA*). Go and dance with Paul, dearie, and put that stupid book away. (*Takes book from her gently*) Paul!

PAUL (*going to her*). Yes?

MARY. I want you to teach Vinny the fox trot.

PAUL. Of course, if you wish it.

MARY (*pulling LAVINIA from chair*). Come, Vinny.

LAVINIA. I hate dancing.

MARY. But you won't when you learn, and Paul is a wonderful teacher. (PAUL offers arm to LAVINIA, which she accepts reluctantly. MARY goes back to her work)

[EXIT PAUL and LAVINIA C. D.]

ENTER ESTHER RICHARDS D. L.

ESTHER (*running to MARY*). Mary, you are getting to be a perfect plugger. Here I've been in this house as your uncle's secretary—let me see—four whole months and you've —

MARY (*interrupting*). I know, but something's got to be done. Things are going from bad to worse. Auntie bought three more hats to-day. (*Rising*) Oh, Esther, it isn't right. It isn't fair—all of us living off Uncle John like this!

ESTHER (*soothing her*). Hush, dear.

MARY. There's Vinny buying books and taking courses from the most expensive teachers, and Aunt Abigail living like a queen and expecting me to dress like a princess, and all of us utterly dependent on Uncle John.

ESTHER. But if he is willing.

MARY. He ought to have a home of his own.

ESTHER. Perhaps he intends to. (*Something in her voice makes MARY turn and look at her. Pause*)

MARY (*putting her arms about ESTHER*). You don't mean—you—oh, you darling! I knew he was in love with you! I've suspected it all along. (*Kisses her heartily*)

ESTHER. We are to be married next month. A very quiet wedding.

MARY (*bewildered*). But where will you live?—Oh, Esther, don't you see it only makes me more determined to straighten things out now.

ESTHER. John said you were to live on here just the same—that nothing was to be any different.

MARY. The old dear! Of course he would say that, but I intend things to be different.

ESTHER. Please don't worry about it. There's nothing you can do.

MARY. Isn't there?—I've thought things all out. (*Drawing ESTHER beside her on couch*) Listen! The Major has got to be made to propose to Auntie.

ESTHER (*laughs*). He never will until something arouses him. He's too sure of her as things are.

MARY. That's just it—but I intend to nettle the old dear a bit. I intend to AROUSE HIS JEALOUSY!

ESTHER. But how?

MARY. Why—simply getting another man to pay attentions to Aunt Abigail!

ESTHER. Mary!

MARY. Uncle John has a friend coming to-morrow—a Mr. Steven Carteret. Oh, you needn't laugh—I've planned things perfectly.

ESTHER. But what if Mr. Steven Carteret refuses to pay attentions to Auntie?

MARY. He won't refuse Uncle John anything. Besides he might as well make himself useful while he's visiting—just a harmless flirtation, you know.

ESTHER. But will John ask him?

MARY. He must.

ESTHER (*rising*). He never will.

MARY (*pulling her down again*). Listen! Come here! He will, if you ask him to.

ESTHER. Oh, I wouldn't.

MARY. You must. I want you to go to him and explain everything.

ESTHER (*groaning*). What would he think?

MARY. He'd enjoy the lark immensely. He thinks the Major has courted his sister long enough. After all, why shouldn't they be married? He loves her and has money enough to give her all she wants.

ESTHER. Yes and down deep I think she really cares for *him*.

MARY. I know she does. It's just a case of arousing the Major a bit! And jealousy is the only way.

ESTHER. What is Mr. Steven Carteret like?

MARY. I haven't the slightest idea. Probably like most of Uncle Johnnie's friends—not half so nice as he is. What I *do* know is he thinks the world of Uncle John.

ESTHER. Even so, it does seem a good deal to ask of the poor man.

MARY. Nonsense! He'd get enough fun out of the Major's jealousy to pay for it.

ESTHER (*dubiously*). Perhaps.

MARY. Then there's Lavinia.

ESTHER (*alarmed*). Good heavens, what are you going to do with Lavinia?

MARY. Marry her to Paul.

ESTHER. To Paul! But he's wild about *you*.

MARY. No—no, not now. I've cured him of that.

ESTHER. Mary!

MARY (*jumping up and twirling about*). Then freedom for Mary. I shall go my own sweet way and poor dear Uncle Johnnie will be rid of us all forever.

ESTHER. Are you really going to work, Mary?

MARY (*seriously*). I am. Haven't you proved to me these last three years the blessing of being single and earning one's own living?

ESTHER. There are setbacks even about earning one's own living.

MARY. You aren't weakening after that simply glorious speech you made to me about being independent. Don't you remember you wound up to a fitting climax with Burns' poem? "Not for a train attendant—but for the glorious privilege of being independent!"

ESTHER (*laughing*). I had had a raise that day!

MARY (*sitting beside her*). No, but seriously, don't you think it's wrong for a girl to marry a man she doesn't love just to get out of working for a living?

ESTHER. I do.

MARY. Of course you do, and that is what it will come to in my case.

ESTHER. Haven't you ever seen a man you could love, Mary?

MARY. No one except Uncle Johnnie, dear—but when I do meet him I shall know him!

ENTER LAVINIA C. D.

MARY (*turning*). Did you have a nice dance, Vinny?

LAVINIA. No, he stepped all over me. (*Takes book from table and goes toward D. L.*)

MARY. Wait, Vinny, I want to talk to you a minute. (*To ESTHER*) You'll find him right away and tell him?

ESTHER (*rising and going to C. D.*). I'll find him right away and compel him. (*MARY rises and goes to LAVINIA*) [EXIT ESTHER C. D.]

LAVINIA. What do you want?

MARY. I suppose you haven't the remotest idea why I want to talk with you.

LAVINIA (*indifferently*). No. Shoot! I want to get back to my story.

MARY. No, Lavinia, you mustn't think of stories or books, or anything to do with them.

LAVINIA (*draws away and regards her sister in amazement*). Say!

MARY. You must promise me.

LAVINIA. Have you suddenly gone mad?

MARY. Lavinia, did you ever think of matrimony?

LAVINIA. I say—Mary—come off.

MARY (*catching her arm*). Please, Lavinia, I'm serious.

LAVINIA. Well then, no.

MARY. But you should be thinking of it, Lavinia. You're quite old enough to.

LAVINIA. Would you think of it, if you had a face like mine?

MARY. Of course I would. There are many men who would like you.

LAVINIA (*scornfully*). Name them.

MARY. If only you'd exert yourself a little—dress differently and smile oftener.

LAVINIA. Smile! If I smiled the width of my mouth I'd frighten a man.

MARY. Don't be silly. You have a good mouth and wonderful teeth.

LAVINIA. What's the meaning of all this anyway?

MARY. I want you to get married, Lavinia.

LAVINIA. Why? Because I can't earn my own living?

MARY. Partly.

LAVINIA. You leave me alone. As long as Uncle John remains single I'll do as I please. Then if he takes him a wife, I'll get a job.

MARY. Did you ever think that's why he doesn't take a wife because he has to support us?

LAVINIA. No—I never did.

MARY. I have.—Lavinia, you'd hate business in any form and so you must get married. Why, if you married the right man you could read all your days in peace.

LAVINIA. But a man never looked at me!

MARY. That's your own fault.

LAVINIA. It isn't. It's nature's.

MARY. I know better. Will you do as I say?

LAVINIA. Um—er maybe.

MARY. Then listen. I've picked out some dresses that will become you. They are on your bed. I have spoken to Mademoiselle and she will do your hair ——

LAVINIA. Oh, my lord!

MARY. You are to leave off those ridiculous spectacles. Dress yourself in the most becoming gown, go to Mademoiselle for approval, then come downstairs and I won't be afraid to bet you have at least one proposal before you go to bed!

LAVINIA. Say!

MARY. I mean it. Will you do as I say?

LAVINIA. I'll do it to prove you are wrong, honey—
(*Running to D. L.*) Jove, it's a lark anyway.

MARY. It is and it's going to be profitable in the end.

LAVINIA (*sweetly*). Bon soir, ma chérie!

[EXITS D. L.]

MARY. I'll look for Uncle John.

[EXITS D. L.]

ENTER JOHN PRICE *and* ESTHER, C. D.

ESTHER (*looking about*). She's gone. Probably upstairs with Lavinia.

JOHN. Poor child. She has a great deal on her mind.
(*Laughs suddenly*)

ESTHER (*going to table*). She will be immensely relieved when I tell her you consent.

JOHN (*following her*). There is yet Steve!

ESTHER (*sitting on chair*). Tell me about him.

JOHN. I'd rather you judged for yourself, dear. If I should describe him it would be as unjust as a mother's description of her only child.

ESTHER. Is he a heart breaker?

JOHN. I shouldn't wonder.—Getting worried?

ESTHER (*laughing*). Not for myself. But suppose Mrs. Manners really falls in love with him? It is rather risky, isn't it?

JOHN. Oh-ho, of course she won't. Abigail intends to marry Bristow.

ESTHER. Tell me what are we going to do with Mary after she succeeds in marrying off the rest of the family?

JOHN. Marry her off too.

ESTHER. Without a career?

JOHN. That's a career, isn't it?

ESTHER. Then you think after all it is the only place for a woman?

JOHN. I'm inclined to think it is the best place for her.

ESTHER (*roguishly*). Oh, you disappoint me terribly. (*Rising*) I—I feel as if I ought to resign.

JOHN. You can't resign without a week's notice at least. And you wouldn't leave me in the midst of the third act like this.

ESTHER. Oh dear, no, if I did I shouldn't sleep wondering how it was to come out.

JOHN. Ah, you see what a hold I have on you.

ESTHER. Yes—you have a tremendous hold on me. Let's get back to work. (*Goes toward C. D.*)

JOHN. Let's not. I feel like a walk in the garden. Do you?

ESTHER. Yes, if you'll talk business.

JOHN. I will. I'll talk of nothing but my play.

ESTHER. What scene?

JOHN. The final love scene.—I want your opinion about it.

ENTER MAJOR BRISTOW C. D. *He is much excited.*

BRISTOW. In the name of goodness, John, who is that young whippersnapper in the hall with your sister?

ESTHER (*to JOHN*). It's Mr. Carteret. He's come!

BRISTOW (*fuming*). I tell you I won't stand it.

JOHN (*appreciating the situation*). Tut—tut, man, what right have you to stop it?

BRISTOW. All the right in the world.—Doesn't she know I intend to marry her?

JOHN. I doubt if she does.

BRISTOW. This is madness. There is no reason to suppose——

JOHN. Have you ever told her your intentions, Major?

BRISTOW (*pacing floor*). Well—er not exactly—not in words—er but of course everyone knows—and I say it is an outrage. Haven't I catered to her whims for the last three years, played cribbage when I preferred poker—ridden in a limousine when I preferred horseback, gone home from parties at the age of the evening because *she* was tired and this is the treatment I get. It is shameful.

JOHN. My dear fellow, you are letting your imagination run away with you. After all, what is the harm in talking with a young man?

BRISTOW (*stopping before JOHN*). Enough! I saw them. He is drinking in her every word. He is gazing into her face with admiration—yes adoration in his eye. I know. He will become infatuated—mad about her and I repeat, I will not stand it.

JOHN. My dear fellow, the whole trouble is this. You should have claimed her years ago. You have waited too long.

BRISTOW (*broken*). Ah yes, I have waited too long.

JOHN (*rubbing it in*). One can't do it, my boy. The other chap you know—the other chap!

BRISTOW. Damn him! [EXITS C. D. *quickly*]

ENTER D. L. LAVINIA. *She is recreated in a beautiful gown, hair stylishly dressed, etc., and pirouettes through doorway.*

ESTHER (*startled*). Lavinia!

LAVINIA. How do you like me, Uncle John?

JOHN (*surveying her from head to foot*). Really, my dear, you are quite remarkable!

LAVINIA. I'm set for the great scene. Do I look ready for conquest?

ESTHER. You do, dear. (*Takes her face between her hands and kisses her*) I'm terribly enthusiastic about you.

LAVINIA. I hope the men will feel the same way. Tell Mary if you should see her, I'm waiting.

ENTER MARY C. D. *Stops to exchange a word with ESTHER and JOHN while LAVINIA, who has not seen her, goes DOWN stage preening herself like a peacock.*

MARY (*going to LAVINIA*). Vinny, you are beyond my wildest expectations. You—you are wonderful!

LAVINIA (*ruefully*). I thought I was in the solitude of my own room but now I've seen you—oh Mary, I wonder I haven't hated you.

MARY. Vinny!

LAVINIA. You're so damned beautiful. (*Genuinely*) You were beautiful as a tiny baby and the first time I "sensed" you I gave up all hope of romance, husband and home!

MARY. Vinny!

LAVINIA. I did and I've never given them a thought since.

MARY. But that was a foolish thing to do. Every woman has her side of beauty and attractiveness, and perhaps the very thing I lack you have. One should never give up until one has failed a hundred times, no, one should never give up at all, as long as life lasts.

LAVINIA. Anyone could be optimistic with your face and figure. I have yet to have it proved to me that I possess charm. (*Seats herself gracefully in chair, preens herself. In a terrible voice*) Bring on the men!

MARY (*looking out window R.*). The good fairy has answered your wish. Here comes Paul! (*Running to her and kissing her brow*) Good-bye, dear, and good luck. I will leave you on the field alone!

[EXITS D. L. *quickly*]

ENTER PAUL R. E.

LAVINIA (*rising to greet him with her prettiest manner*). Good evening, monsieur.

PAUL (*completely aghast*). Lavinia!

LAVINIA (*twirling about*). You like me?

PAUL. I say you're jolly.

LAVINIA. I am the product of Mademoiselle and Vogue! (*Sits herself*)

PAUL (*pulling up a chair beside her*). I think I'll stay.

LAVINIA. Stay with me?

PAUL. Of course. You're wonderful.

LAVINIA. Oh, Paul!

PAUL. I say you are. Why, Vinny, you're a dream. (*With boyishness*) I—I never thought you could look like this.

LAVINIA (*simply*). I'm glad you like me.

PAUL (*touching her gown gently*). What is—this stuff?

LAVINIA. If you promise not to tell anyone I'll whisper where it came from.

PAUL (*solemnly*). I promise.

LAVINIA (*snickering*). The fairies!

PAUL. Jove, I believe it did at that. It's worked magic! And your hair. Your hair is—ah sublime! (*Whispers*) Is—is it a wig?

LAVINIA (*disgusted*). Of course not.

PAUL. But your hair was short and ——

LAVINIA. So it is now but it's CURLED! STUPID!

PAUL. It's grand. (*Sighs*)

LAVINIA (*because there is nothing else to say and she is shy*). I'm glad you like me.

PAUL. Like you? Why, Vinny, when I think of you behind those goggles ——

LAVINIA. Don't. Don't recall them.

PAUL (*solemnly*). I won't, if it pains you.

LAVINIA (*as solemnly*). It does.

PAUL. I wouldn't pain you for all the world.

LAVINIA. Wouldn't you? Say it again.

PAUL (*repeating*). I wouldn't pain you for all the world.

LAVINIA. Paul?

PAUL. Yes?

LAVINIA. I did it all for you.

PAUL. You darling!

LAVINIA. Oh Paul, you mustn't, not in here.

PAUL. I've got to say it.

LAVINIA. But not here.

PAUL. Where then?

LAVINIA. In the garden.

PAUL (*taking her hand*). Come!

LAVINIA. Oh dear!

PAUL. What is it?

LAVINIA. I'm—I'm ——

PAUL. Don't be afraid, Vinny. It's something awfully nice.

LAVINIA (*breathlessly as he leads her to R. E.*). Paul, do you like girls who read?

PAUL. Come out here, and I'll tell you.

[EXIT LAVINIA and PAUL R. E.]

ENTER C. D. MRS. MANNERS and STEVE CARTERET.
They are chatting.

MRS. MANNERS (*in her sweetest voice*). Do sit down, Mr. Carteret. My brother is such a difficult person to find. I am quite sure he is in, in spite of what the maid said. (BRISTOW *appears at C. D. but is unseen by them*) I will go for him myself.

CARTERET. Oh no, I wouldn't have you. Really I can wait. Then too he is expecting me.

MRS. MANNERS. He is and asked to be informed the minute you arrived. (*Foolishly*) Perhaps I shouldn't have talked to you in the hall. But you'll forgive me? (*Goes toward D. L.*)

CARTERET (*politely*). Most certainly. I am sure I was as much to blame. (CARTERET *sits and* BRISTOW *disappears*) [EXIT MRS. MANNERS D. L.]

ENTER MARY C. D. *to pass through the room.* CARTERET *rises and they face each other.*

MARY. I—I beg your pardon.—You—you are ——

CARTERET. Steven Carteret.

MARY. Oh! (*They stare at each other*)

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE.—*The same as ACT I. Two weeks later. Evening. At rise of curtain stage is empty.*

ENTER CARTERET and MRS. MANNERS C. D., *chatting.*

MRS. MANNERS (*leaning on CARTERET'S arm*). You clever person. How do you say such witty things!

CARTERET. A witty person is only one who can apply borrowed humor opportunely.

MRS. MANNERS. Oh, Mr. Carteret, how enchantingly droll. (*Sits on day-bed facing audience. CARTERET also sits on day-bed, back to audience*)

CARTERET. Who could be dull with a beautiful woman to inspire him?

MRS. MANNERS. Tut—tut, Mr. Carteret. (*Striking him gently on cheek with fan*) I believe you are flirting with me.

CARTERET. Not at all. Only the truth. I always tell the truth to people I admire—if it's agreeable.

MRS. MANNERS. How deliciously subtle of you. Such rare delicacy. I don't mind what people say behind my back as long as they are nice to my face. I abhor people who start in by saying, "I am telling you for your own good,"—and then go on ruthlessly to the bitter end. It's so embarrassing to hear the truth about one's self and so few people realize it.

CARTERET. Cigarette? (*Each select one*)

MRS. MANNERS. You don't mind?

CARTERET. Not at all.

MRS. MANNERS. I thought I'd better ask. Young people are getting so prudish these days about their elders.

CARTERET. You need have no fear of coming under that ban.

MRS. MANNERS. I don't know. I admit thirty-five and then there are my grown up nieces. Nieces are so

delightfully indefinite. No matter how old they are nobody can actually prove anything on you.

CARTERET. Haven't I heard that line before?

MRS. MANNERS. Have you really? I must pick my witticisms from more obscure plays.

CARTERET. Any witticism seems fresh from your lips.

MRS. MANNERS. How gallant you are.

CARTERET. How easy it is to be gallant—to you.

MRS. MANNERS. I—really—Mr. Carteret——

CARTERET. Steven.

MRS. MANNERS (*shyly*). Steven.

CARTERET (*with emotion*). Again!—Say it again!

MRS. MANNERS (*softly*). Steven!

CARTERET. Thank you—I—how beautifully you said it—It was as though I had never heard it before.

(BRISTOW *appears at c. d.*)

MRS. MANNERS (*putting hand to her face in agitation*). Steven—I——

CARTERET (*sees BRISTOW*). Again! (*In passionate undertones*) Like soft winds soughing through firs by moonlight—limpid waves lapping the lily-bordered shore. (*Caressing her hand*) Pale hands floating in alabaster. (*Kisses her hands*)

MRS. MANNERS (*rising, disturbed*). Steven—I had no idea—Mr. Carteret—please——

CARTERET (*pulling her down to him. Forgets himself in his enthusiasm*). Not that—Steven to you—always. To hear the word from those scarlet lips! Those passionate lips like twin drops of heart's blood—only that word, always—always—Steven. (BRISTOW *goes off annoyed*)

MRS. MANNERS. Steven—Steven—my dear. I had no idea—it was—like this. I—I'm not well—Steven, I too—— (*Leans back as if about to faint; he puts an arm about her to steady her*) Steven! (*She embraces him*) I love you—too! Dear Steven—Steven!

CARTERET (*as he realizes what it all means*). My God!

MRS. MANNERS. Kiss me, dear. (*He obeys. She draws a long shuddering sigh*) The betrothal kiss!

CARTERET (*aside*). Betrothal!—Oh God!

MRS. MANNERS (*releasing CARTERET*). You've made me so happy, Steven! To find a love like this—It means so much to me! Romance—youth—Oh Steven! (*Hides her head happily on his shoulder whereupon he dutifully kisses her*)

CARTERET (*somewhat embarrassed*). You'll pardon me for asking, but what is your first name? I may be wrong but it seems rather cold to call the woman (*Gulps*) one is going to marry Mrs. Manners.

MRS. MANNERS. Abigail. I was named for a wealthy aunt. She never materialized. She left her money to an orphan asylum, but oh, nothing matters now but you and I. We are everything. We are the world, alone—alone.

CARTERET (*looking wildly around*). Yes, thank heaven!

MRS. MANNERS (*with prolonged sigh*). When shall we be married?

CARTERET (*staggered*). Uh—Ah—why, there's no hurry!

MRS. MANNERS. It's all so sudden.

CARTERET. Eh—Yes! Yes—very!

MRS. MANNERS. How long have you cherished this secret passion for me?

CARTERET (*utterly unnerved*). Er—ah—ah—quite a long time. Quite a long time.

MRS. MANNERS (*fondly*). My knight!

CARTERET. Oh, what a night!

MRS. MANNERS. Do you think we'd better have a church wedding? Perhaps we'd better have a quiet one. It's my second chance, you know.

CARTERET. Oh—a church wedding would be quite all right. As noisy as you like. If you want it to be really spectacular, however, we might elope.

MRS. MANNERS. Steven! Not really. You wouldn't. (*Secretly delighted with the idea*)

CARTERET. Oh no, of course not, oh never!

MRS. MANNERS (*disappointed*). Oh—Well—when will we tell everyone?

CARTERET (*turning from her*). Good lord!

ENTER BRISTOW C. D.

BRISTOW (*coughing*). A—er how do you do?

CARTERET (*rising*). Hulloo, Major.

MRS. MANNERS. My dear Major, good evening. (CARTERET *lights a cigarette*. *Pause*)

CARTERET. If it weren't so banal, I'd say it was a beautiful night.

MRS. MANNERS (*embarrassed*). It's the best night we've had since a week from last Tuesday.

CARTERET (*flatly*). We've had lovely weather all the year.

MRS. MANNERS. It rained a bit last spring.

CARTERET. Oh, but it's been fine since—perfectly beautiful. (*Silence again*)

MRS. MANNERS. I ——

CARTERET. I ——

BRISTOW. I —— (*Silence while BRISTOW and CARTERET regard each other*) Well —— (MRS. MANNERS *fidgets*)

CARTERET (*regarding his watch earnestly*). I think I'll look up Johnnie.

BRISTOW (*forced*). Oh, don't go.

CARTERET. Sorry, but I must. (*Starts toward C. D.*)

MRS. MANNERS (*rising*). But Steven —— (*Says it so low that CARTERET does not hear her*)

[EXIT CARTERET C. D.]

BRISTOW (*going down to MRS. MANNERS*). Abigail— for a long time I have been endeavoring to see you alone! (*He is upset*)

MRS. MANNERS. Look your fill, old dear. You see me alone.

BRISTOW. Abigail, my emotions are too deep to be taken lightly.

MRS. MANNERS. Daniel, if John Price has been giving you some more of our private stock ——

BRISTOW. Abigail, I beg of you. Hear me!

MRS. MANNERS (*with a sigh*). As if I could hear anything else.

BRISTOW (*in a terrible voice*). Don't mock me, Abigail.

MRS. MANNERS. Daniel, before you begin let it be distinctly understood that you are not to say I am the first woman you ever loved. (CROSSES)

BRISTOW (*simply*). Abigail—I love you.

MRS. MANNERS. Ah!

BRISTOW. I want you to marry me—to-day—to-morrow! (CROSSES *to her*)

MRS. MANNERS (*hesitating*). To-day? Impossible! To-morrow? The Society for the Reestablishment of Ruined Charnon meets to-morrow.

BRISTOW. You are mocking me! (*Paces the floor*)

MRS. MANNERS (*icily*). Furthermore, I can't oblige you at all. I'm reserved. Already taken!

BRISTOW (*wildly*). You're not going to be married!

MRS. MANNERS. Why not? Are you the only one who has a right to lose his head?

BRISTOW (*meekly*). I had hoped that after so many years —

MRS. MANNERS. Don't remind me of them. The wasted years! If I could only subtract them from the grand total.

BRISTOW. This has upset me! (*Turning on her*) Ruined me! You meant much to me, Abigail, how much you will never know.

ENTER PAUL and JOHN R. E.

JOHN (*looking from one to the other*). Danny, old boy, congratulations! (*Wrings his hand heartily*)

MRS. MANNERS (*with a shrug*). Aren't you taking a good deal for granted?

JOHN (*turning and facing her*). Er—ah, isn't it only natural to suppose that such a devoted courtship should end so? Eh, Paul, my boy?

PAUL (*sadly*). You are optimistic, sir.

MRS. MANNERS. My dear brother, you are wholly mistaken. The Major and I are not to be married. To be sure the "devoted courtship" ends—but not in matrimony for *him*.

JOHN. What! You're not going to marry him?

MRS. MANNERS (*smiling sweetly*). No, John. I am not going to marry *Daniel*. (BRISTOW *groans*)

BRISTOW (*in a desperate tone to JOHN*). She has accepted Carteret.

JOHN. Abby, what have you done? Tell me, what have you done?

MRS. MANNERS. You treat me quite as if I were a child incapable of thinking for myself. (JOHN *groans*)

JOHN. Abigail, this is outrageous!

MRS. MANNERS. Indeed!

JOHN. Don't you realize what it means?

MRS. MANNERS. Don't be silly. I've been married before.

JOHN. What will people say?

MRS. MANNERS (*with a shrug*). The usual nasty things. That's what weddings are for.

JOHN (*fairly gasping*). But you—you are old enough to be his mother.

MRS. MANNERS (*angrily*). You brute. Have you no sense of decency? I'm not old enough to be his mother, and besides, you ought to be tactful enough not to shout it to the wide heavens. Moreover I wish you would learn to control this newly developed complex for revealing family scandals. It is a thoroughly tasteless procedure. When you can speak to me as you should I will talk with you. (*Sweeps toward D. L. and EXITS. JOHN paces the floor. PAUL is embarrassed with it all and BRISTOW continues to moan and mumble*)

ENTER CARTERET C. D.

CARTERET (*taking in the situation at a glance*). Here I am. Do with me what you will.

BRISTOW (*fairly hissing*). Scoundrel!

[EXITS C. D., *fuming*

JOHN. In the name of heaven, Steve, what have you done?

CARTERET (*helplessly*). Just what you asked me to do.

JOHN. But you proposed to her!

CARTERET. I must have—At least she accepted me! We are to be married when she says the word.

JOHN (*slapping him on the back*). Nonsense!

CARTERET. I lost myself in a fit of eloquence, said too much and here I am!

JOHN (*refusing to take it seriously*). With a life sentence!

PAUL. But the thing can be broken up, old chap.

CARTERET. How?

PAUL. Oh, somehow—anyhow.

CARTERET. I doubt it without hurting her terribly.

JOHN. Come, come, of course something can be done about it.

CARTERET. I refuse to let them humiliate her.

JOHN. But you can't go through with this, Steve, and she ought to realize it.

CARTERET. But she doesn't and so there's nothing to do but marry her.

ENTER LAVINIA and MARY C. D.

LAVINIA (*greatly excited*). Have you heard the news? Auntie's engaged!

MARY. Danny, the old duck, I'm so pleased. (*Roguishly*) Uncle Danny!

JOHN (*sadly*). It's not Danny who is to be your uncle, my dear!

MARY (*looking from one to the other*). What do you mean?

JOHN. It's Steve!

MARY (*turning*). Mr. Carteret!

CARTERET (*tragically*). Mary!

MARY. You! (*Unconsciously the rest watch them*)

But I don't understand. You asked my aunt to *marry* you?

CARTERET (*desperately*). Oh!

MARY (*turning to the others*). It's unthinkable.

JOHN. It's all a hideous mistake and our own fault!

LAVINIA. We didn't ask him to propose! We ——

JOHN. Hush! Something's got to be done.

PAUL (*starting*). Good heavens, what?

JOHN. Go to your aunt, Lavinia, and try to reason her into a sensible mood.

LAVINIA. You don't know what you're asking of me, but I'll try. [EXITS D. L.]

JOHN. Paul, let's find the Major before he does something rash!

PAUL. He's a bit upset, I'll say.

[EXIT PAUL and JOHN C. D.]

MARY (*after a pause*). How could you?

CARTERET (*earnestly*). Believe me when I say it was all a misunderstanding.

MARY. Of course you did it for us. (*Sitting*) I—I am so sorry. (*Looking up at him*) You see I didn't for a moment think you would ask her to marry you and then, even so, I didn't think she would accept. I had hoped for something different.

CARTERET (*with meaning*). So had I! (*Pause*) I don't mean to be sentimental and trite and all this, I suppose it sounds rather like a penny ballad. I've always had in my mind an idea of what might some day be a fine home, a family and happiness. Some men marry because they don't like hotel food, others because they can't afford not to. They have a sort of married life but oh, it's so unsatisfactory! My ideal has been so different from all that and now I've got to forget it and try to make up to her for what I've done!

MARY (*going to him*). I'm sorry, so sorry if you have to give up your dream.

CARTERET. It's more than a dream, Mary.

MARY. You mean you have found her? (*He nods*) Oh!

CARTERET. I've wanted to tell you about her.

MARY (*softly*). Tell me about her—please.

CARTERET. No—no! Can't you see how futile it all is?

MARY. Sometimes one likes to talk of things even if they are in vain.

CARTERET. I suppose it brings a kind of comfort.

MARY. We have made you so unhappy I feel that if I can bring even "a kind of comfort" I ought to do it.

CARTERET. Oh, Mary! (*Taking her hands in his*) Can't you see? Don't you understand? (*Looks into her eyes*)

MARY. Steven!—Don't tell me it's that! Oh, I can't bear it.

CARTERET (*drawing her to him*). Mary, I love you. You—you are all that I've looked for in a woman and more! (*Kisses her gently and she withdraws*)

MARY. You shouldn't have told me. I'm sorry that you told me.

CARTERET. It's the last time, Mary. I can never tell you again what I've told you to-night. But I shall think of you and always it will be you who lead me on to better things. (*Turns abruptly and* EXITS D. L.

MARY goes DOWN stage and stands very still)

ENTER JOHN, ESTHER, LAVINIA and PAUL C. D.

LAVINIA (*running to MARY*). Oh Mary, all the world knows it now.

MARY. Hush, Vinny.

PAUL (*sputtering*). Why must women tell everything they know the minute they hear it?

LAVINIA. They're no worse than the men! I heard that fat, foolish Mr. Keyes telling that slim snaky wife of his right at our garden gate.

MARY (*to JOHN*). Did you find the Major?

JOHN. In despair. I'm afraid it's a hard blow to him.

LAVINIA. It's his own fault.

PAUL. Come, Lavvy, don't be too hard on the old duffer.

LAVINIA. But he's so slow.

PAUL. Well, of course, every courtship can't be as speedy as ours, love.

JOHN. I—I feel deucedly about Steve.

ESTHER (*going to him*). We are going to right things, dear. We've got to right them. They can't go on. (JOHN *pats her hand*)

MARY. If only we could make her see how silly she is.

JOHN. No woman can be made to appear ridiculous to herself—especially if she is in love. Let's go about things with more system. (*Unconsciously they gather about JOHN. They are very serious*) What is the chief objection to the marriage?

LAVINIA. Dear Uncle Johnnie, this is the way he works out his plots.

MARY. Hush!

ESTHER. The chief objection seems to be the great difference in their ages.

JOHN. Exactly. She must be made to realize how old she is.

LAVINIA (*fairly jumping up and down*). I know. Oh, Uncle John, I've got it. Just weary her with parties—parties, all kinds of parties until ——

PAUL. Jove, Lavvy, the very thing!

LAVINIA (*much excited takes the center of the circle*). We young people will get together and plan a week's schedule—horseback riding before breakfast, tennis, luncheon down town, golf in the afternoon, tea party at five, dinner and dance at night.

JOHN. Whew, it tires me to think of it, but I believe the child has solved it.

PAUL. Who says I'm not going to have a clever wife?

LAVINIA. Of course Steve will enjoy the larks immensely. He's the most energetic man I ever met. Oh, whoop-la, we'll lead Aunt Abigail a chase!

JOHN (*anxiously*). We might begin right away to-night. (*Turning to ESTHER*) You look grave, my dear.

ESTHER. I was thinking of poor Mrs. Manners!

MARY. That's like you—honey! But poor Auntie will only suffer for a short time, and with Mr. Carteret it's for life.

ESTHER. Of course. Besides she needn't suffer at all if she'll be sensible and give up the first thing.

LAVINIA. What shall it be to-night?

PAUL. Oh, I say a dance with a supper at midnight, eh, Vinny?

JOHN. A dance it is.

MARY. There's a dance the Wex Club is giving—a dance with two orchestras.

LAVINIA (*fairly hopping*). With two orchestras—the very thing. No chance to sit between dances!

ENTER CARTERET *and* MRS. MANNERS D. L.

LAVINIA (*running up to* MRS. MANNERS). Oh, I say, Auntie, we're going to the dance to celebrate your engagement to-night. It's to begin a regular festival week in honor of the affair. (*All talk at once*)

MARY. To-morrow morning——

ESTHER. In the afternoon golf at the country club and——

JOHN. My dear Abigail—a dinner in your honor!

PAUL. Oh, I say, Mrs. Manners, the set's all made up for to-morrow at tennis. You and Mr. Carteret against——

MRS. MANNERS (*warding them off*). Please—please—My dears——

CARTERET. Ah—just such a week as I enjoy.

MRS. MANNERS. I don't know about all this celebrating. I want to rest a bit for the ball day after to-morrow.

MARY. Poor Auntie!

LAVINIA (*an arm about her*). Of course you aren't as young as you used to be and you can't keep up the pace we can, Auntie dear.

MRS. MANNERS (*disgusted*). Nonsense! Don't be

absurd! (*Turning to CARTERET*) Your arm, Steve!
(*They go toward C. D.*)

LAVINIA (*following after them*). And we've planned the wildest party for Tuesday. Get up at four—walk two miles without breakfast and watch the sun rise from Linnekin's Hill!

PAUL. Hot stuff!

MRS. MANNERS (*getting daring*). Oh, let's sit up all night and save the trouble of waking ourselves!

[EXEUNT MRS. MANNERS and CARTERET C. D.]

JOHN (*flinging his arms about*). On with the dance, and heaven knows who pays the piper!!!

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE.—*The same as ACTS I and II. One week later. Morning. As the curtain rises MRS. MANNERS is DISCOVERED on day-bed sleeping soundly. Her shoes are off and she is perfectly happy.*

ENTER SUSAN D. L., going to day-bed.

SUSAN (*calling*). Mrs. Manners. (MRS. MANNERS moans) Mrs. Manners! (SUSAN is undecided what to do but finally goes to her and touches her gently) Mrs. Manners! (*Shakes her gently*) Mrs. Manners! (*To herself*) Good Lord! (*Aloud*) Mrs. Manners!

MRS. MANNERS (*feebly*). Go away.

SUSAN. The masseuse is here.

MRS. MANNERS (*in low moan*). O-oh!

SUSAN. But she is waiting.

MRS. MANNERS (*opening her eyes*). Oh, go away and leave me to the little happiness life has left me.

SUSAN (*exhausted*). But the masseuse!

MRS. MANNERS (*wearily*). Can go to the devil!

SUSAN. And the hair-dresser? She is due in fifteen minutes.

MRS. MANNERS (*more to herself*). For twenty years I have been a slave to hair-dressers, masseuses, manicurists. My complexion has cost me more than my house. (*SUSAN is embarrassed*) I have given myself up to all sorts of beauty treatments because I didn't dare let my face do what nature intended it to do. To-day I revolt. Tell them to go away.

SUSAN (*distressed*). But your complexion.

MRS. MANNERS. I'll sit with my back to the light. I've had to anyway for the last five years. Leave the room and if you tell anyone where I am and what I'm doing I'll discharge you without notice.

SUSAN. Yes—Mrs. Manners. (*MRS. MANNERS settles herself for slumber with one long sigh*)

[EXIT SUSAN D. L.]

JOHN (*off stage*). Abigail!

LAVINIA (*off stage*). Auntie! Auntie!

PAUL (*off stage*). Mrs. Manners! I say—Mrs. Manners!

MARY (*off stage*). Aunt Abigail!

ALL (*off stage*). Yoo-hoo! Aunt Abigail! Mrs. Manners! Yoo-hoo! Where are you? (*MRS. MANNERS tosses cushions onto floor and rolls off bed out of sight of the rest of the room*)

ENTER MARY, LAVINIA, PAUL, JOHN and BRISTOW C. D.

JOHN. Abigail! (*More persistently*) Abigail! Abigail!

MARY (*looking about*). Isn't she here?

JOHN. Apparently not.

PAUL. She must have gone out. (*Runs to window and peers out*)

LAVINIA. She's never in the garden, Paul—not in the glare of the morning sun.

MARY. She'll be here soon.

LAVINIA. Heaven knows what has become of her.

Oh, Uncle John, suppose she should marry Steve after all this?

BRISTOW. If she does it will be over my dead body.
(MRS. MANNERS *listens*)

LAVINIA. But she's so determined and we can't persuade her not to. She won't—she simply won't listen to reason.

PAUL. Don't you think our scheme is going to work?

MARY. I don't know. It seems she ought to have given in long ago. (*Sits*)

JOHN. Then we must get out an injunction against her marriage.

LAVINIA. Never! The quickest way to make her do a thing is to forbid her to do it.

BRISTOW. I only know I am going to fight against that match until my last trick is exhausted.—If it's possible to do it, I'll break it up.

JOHN. We're all with you, Danny, to the last man of us. We want to see it broken as well as you do.

ENTER CARTERET C. D.

JOHN. Hulloo, Steve, old boy. Where's Abigail?

CARTERET. I am looking for her. I thought perhaps she was here.

LAVINIA. She isn't and we haven't the slightest idea what's become of her.

PAUL. Has the coach come? (PAUL and BRISTOW *talk*)

CARTERET. Yes. And the rest of the bunch too.

MARY (*rising*). We mustn't keep them waiting. Where is Auntie?

LAVINIA. Hasn't *Esther* seen her? (JOHN and CARTERET *talk together*)

CARTERET. Miss Richards is out talking with the Smiths.

MARY. We'll have to go without Auntie, that's all.

LAVINIA. Never! (*To MARY*) This hike is my coup d'état.

MARY (*laughing*). Are you sure you're right?

LAVINIA (*pulling MARY aside while the rest talk*). I'm afraid our scheme is going to fail, Mary. I feel it in my bones.

MARY. Don't, Vinny.

LAVINIA. I do—I do and I—oh, get the rest of the bunch out, will you? I want to talk to Paul.

MARY. What's the matter?

LAVINIA. Nothing—please do as I say.

MARY. But we must start.

LAVINIA. I can't. I shan't anyway until Aunt Abigail appears. Let the Smiths go on ahead. Please, Mary.

MARY (*turning*). Uncle John, let's go out to the coaches and explain to Mrs. Smith.

CARTERET. I'll search the garden once again for Abigail. [EXITS R. E.]

JOHN. I think we'd better make some explanation. Coming, Daniel?

MARY. We'll all go. (*Start toward c. d.*)

LAVINIA. Paul?

PAUL (*turning back*). Yes, Vinny.

LAVINIA. Don't go yet. I've something to say to you.

[EXIT MARY, JOHN, and BRISTOW C. D.]

PAUL. Anything the matter, Vinny? (*Goes down to her*)

LAVINIA. It's something I want to say to you—that I feel I ought to say to you. (MRS. MANNERS *takes this opportunity to EXIT D. L. unnoticed*)

PAUL. What is it, dear? You look tired. This week has been too much for you too.

LAVINIA. Oh, it's not that. It's—it's this—— (*Slipping off engagement ring*) I'm sorry—I—I can't keep it. (*Choking*)

PAUL. Vinny!

LAVINIA. Please don't make it any harder.

PAUL. But I don't understand.

LAVINIA. It's just this. When I accepted your offer of marriage I was free to do so. Now I'm not.

PAUL. What do you mean?

LAVINIA. I can't marry you with all—the—talk there is about Aunt Abigail and Steven. The notoriety!

PAUL. Why, Vinny, you're absurd!

LAVINIA. I can hear them—what they'll say. "Oh, yes, she's the niece of that Mrs. Manners who married a man young enough to be her son." Babble—babble—the tongues will go. I can't stand it and I don't ask you to.

PAUL. Be reasonable. Do you think I care two sticks for that? And besides nothing like that is going to happen. They wouldn't say it. They wouldn't dare.

LAVINIA. Oh, yes they would. It's the natural thing for them to do. It's one of the things that just will be, like ministers and chewing gum and church weddings. It's useless to attempt to prevent it.

PAUL. How foolish we are, talking this way! Your aunt isn't going to marry him. Our scheme will work. It's absolutely logical and it must.

LAVINIA (*desperately*). But for that very reason it will fail. Women and logic have nothing in common.

PAUL. Vinny, you're talking absurdly. Anyway whether it fails or whether it doesn't is not the point. The point is you're going to marry me as you promised.

LAVINIA. No, Paul, I can't.

PAUL. You don't want to marry me. It's just a scheme you're working to get rid of me.

LAVINIA. Paul dear, please—please. Don't make it so hard. It's awful enough anyway without—without this.
(Weeps) [EXITS D. L.]

PAUL. Vinny! (*Stands for a moment regarding the ring then* EXITS *irresolutely* R. E.)

ENTER MRS. MANNERS C. D. *She looks about room cautiously, sees no one, goes to window and beckons to CARTERET.*

MRS. MANNERS. Steven! Steven! Come here at once.

ENTER CARTERET *at R. E.*

MRS. MANNERS (*leading him DOWN stage*). Something's got to be done!

CARTERET. What is it? What do you mean?

MRS. MANNERS. They are trying to prevent our marriage.

CARTERET (*hopefully*). No!

MRS. MANNERS. They are doing all sorts of perfectly horrible things. Steve—there's only one course for us! We've got to elope!

CARTERET (*staggered*). Elope!

MRS. MANNERS. We'll go at once!

CARTERET (*wildly*). But they are waiting for us—out there! They are planning a party in our honor.

MRS. MANNERS. What does that matter? What does anything matter? Oh Steve—don't let them stop us. I shall die!

CARTERET (*wildly*). But my laundry hasn't come back and I need a new tube of tooth paste and oh, don't you see we can't elope? Not now!!

MRS. MANNERS. We can't *delay*. If we do, we are lost. Steven!

CARTERET (*wildly*). I tell you we can't—not now! I —

MRS. MANNERS (*pulling him to D. L.*). There is time. There is time, I say. (*He holds back*) If you don't come, I shall scream—I shall faint—I shall, oh! Steven!

CARTERET. Yes—yes—hush, we will elope!

MRS. MANNERS. Hurry! Pack your things. I'll get Susan!

CARTERET. Wait! We must leave a note!

MRS. MANNERS. A note!

CARTERET. Telling them.

MRS. MANNERS. No—no, we haven't time.

CARTERET (*going to table and finding paper and pencil*). Come here! You will write it.

MRS. MANNERS (*wringing her hands*). Oh, how can

you? How can you make me do it? They will be in and then —

CARTERET. Come here. (*She obeys. He hands her the pencil*)

MRS. MANNERS. I can't think! I can't write.

CARTERET. Hush!

MRS. MANNERS. What shall I say?

CARTERET. Say "Dear Mary" —

MRS. MANNERS (*sitting at table*). But why "Dear Mary"? It's to everyone.

CARTERET (*with a sigh*). "Dear Everyone"—then.

MRS. MANNERS (*writes*). No, I'll say "My dears." Then what?

CARTERET (*hesitating*). Er—you might say —

MRS. MANNERS. Please be quick.

CARTERET. You might say —

MRS. MANNERS. Yes—yes.

CARTERET. "This is to let you know I am off to be married." (*She writes furiously. He watches the door hopefully while he bites his lips*)

MRS. MANNERS. Surely that is enough.

CARTERET (*nervously*). Oughtn't you to say some message?

MRS. MANNERS (*tapping her foot*). Message?

CARTERET. Yes, message to your nieces—they do that sort of thing, don't they?

MRS. MANNERS. It isn't necessary. They never listen to my advice when I talk it and I'm sure they wouldn't when I write it. (*Rising*)

CARTERET. But you haven't signed it.

MRS. MANNERS (*sitting again*). Oh dear—how particular you are. (*Writes her name feverishly*) There! (*Folding it*)

CARTERET. Where shall we lay it?

MRS. MANNERS. Anywhere.

CARTERET. But they might not find it.

MRS. MANNERS (*going to c. d.*). Lavinia would find it if I hid it in the coal bin.

CARTERET. I'll lay it on the table.

MRS. MANNERS. Come! Please, Steve. Hark! (*They listen*) They're coming. I'll meet you in fifteen minutes. I won't need to pack anything. I won't even change my dress.

CARTERET (*gravely*). You'll—you'll rouge a bit.

MRS. MANNERS (*her hand to her face*). Heavens! I suppose I'm as pale as a ghost.

CARTERET. No—no, but I—I——

MRS. MANNERS (*gayly*). My dear, I'll come down looking like the girl on the magazine cover! [EXITS D.L.]

CARTERET (*starts toward C. D. and meets MARY ENTERING*). Mary!

MARY. Are you ready to go?

CARTERET. Er—why yes, I suppose so.

MARY. And Aunt Abigail?

CARTERET. Will be down presently. She—she was delayed.

MARY. We can wait. (*She is about to go off C. D.*)

CARTERET. Mary—if—if something happens soon—something extraordinary, you'll remember our conversation the other day and what I said about your being the one I loved.

MARY. Oh Steven, don't.

CARTERET. I'm sorry if I've annoyed you.

MARY (*dully*). It's not that. But oh, Steve, why do you do it? Why are you carrying on this tragic farce?

CARTERET. I must—Mary. It's the only way—the only right way. It wouldn't be decent to tell your aunt the truth.

MARY. There are bigger issues than that—our happiness—everything in our lives, everything depends on the decision we make. Aunt Abigail can get over that. It's only a blow to her pride. It can't hurt deeply, but with us it's different. We need each other. We must have each other. Steven——

CARTERET. I—I shall always love you.

MARY. Then why can't we have each other? Are we puppets to be jerked about on invisible strings? Can't

we think for ourselves—feel for ourselves—do for ourselves?

CARTERET. For two thousand years men have been asking the same thing. Æschylus wrote:

“ Oh whither ere it be fulfilled
Ere its fierce blast be hushed and stilled
Shall blow the wind of doom? ”

And now you ask it. It's—it's so futile.

MARY (*bitterly*). It gives one a certain perspective on one's self, doesn't it?

CARTERET (*going DOWN stage*). After all, Mary, what is life but an unfulfilled desire? We're always reaching for the thing that's out of reach. We want to attain the unattainable. We're squirrels in a mad race in our little cage—wheels always going, going, never reaching anything. We go on trying and trying. We may run ever so fast but we'll never get there. Ten years from now we'll be no happier than we are now. We'll still be waiting for the to-morrow that is to bring us our wish; the to-morrow that will always be to-morrow.

MARY (*going DOWN to him*). I—I can't accept things like that.

CARTERET. Surely you'll admit I can't desert her now.

MARY. Yes, Steve.

CARTERET. There are some things we must go through with and now the bargain is sealed, we've got to give way to organized society. So many times we have to live as other people want us to and not according to our own wishes. If I—I should desert your aunt now what would society think of me?

MARY. Oh, I'm sure it's not society you're thinking of, Steve. It's not society whose opinion you fear. It is your own conscience. You—you couldn't bear to see her humiliated.

CARTERET. Perhaps not. But—I would be dubbed a

coward—a man whose word meant nothing. Mary, don't we have to depend on others for our happiness after all? We've got to have friends and companions or we can't be happy.

MARY. We'd have each other, Steve.

CARTERET. But always when we were happiest would come the realization that over the wrecked lives of others was built the road that led to our happiness.

MARY (*on verge of collapse*). The others! The others! Oh God, the others! Is there no one in the world that matters but they! (EXITS C. D. CARTERET *looks after her, starts to follow her, stops as if it were useless. Voices of the others off stage. CARTERET makes a dash toward R. E. to escape seeing them*)

BRISTOW (*off stage*). I will never forgive myself if she marries Carteret.

JOHN (*off stage. He is beginning to fear the worst*). Oh, buck up, Danny. The week's not *all* over.

ENTER BRISTOW and JOHN C. D.

BRISTOW. But there hasn't been any indication whatsoever that she is weakening.

JOHN. No *visible* indication. And there won't be until all of a sudden she will give in without the slightest warning.

BRISTOW. I can't put any faith in your psychology.

JOHN. I'm willing to wager that Abigail is on the verge of a collapse. This week has been too much for all of us. I can't stand it much longer. Steve is dog tired. Lavinia and Paul and Esther only live by snatching naps. Abigail hasn't had time to sleep at all for more than a few hours at a time. It stands to reason that she's got to give in soon. We've made her understand—Steve has made her understand that this is the life he likes and expects his wife to like.

BRISTOW. I can't understand! I shall never understand the whole proceeding.

JOHN. Abigail is attractive, Danny, my boy.

BRISTOW. Ah yes, attractive, I don't deny that —

JOHN. And she liked the nice things Steve said to her —

BRISTOW. The scoundrel!

JOHN. A woman likes it, Danny.

BRISTOW. But I love her, John. I need her to make my life complete. Without her I'm like an empty wine bottle, only good for what I might be. I intended to marry her—I—I—Jove, of course I intended to marry her. I never intended otherwise. Did I?

JOHN. I'm sure I don't know, Danny.

BRISTOW. But things were going smooth and I was comfortable.—Damn this young upstart.

JOHN (*going down to table*). You'll marry her yet—Daniel.

BRISTOW. Your optimism is maddening.

JOHN (*looking among papers*). I'd wager my next year's royalties that she'll never marry Steve.

BRISTOW. Put that down on paper. (*Much excited*) Put that down on paper! (JOHN *discovers note*) And by Jove, I hope you win if I lose a thousand. (JOHN *is reading the message*) And it's the first time I ever wanted anyone to get the best of me!

JOHN (*in a terrible voice*). Dan!

BRISTOW (*going to him*). Good God! what is it?

JOHN (*sinking into nearest chair*). They've done it!

BRISTOW (*with misgivings*). Done what?

JOHN. Eloped!

BRISTOW (*snatching note from JOHN's hands*). I'll be damned. (*Reading from note*) "My dears —"

JOHN. Something's got to be done.

BRISTOW. "My dears —"

JOHN. Something's got to be done. (BRISTOW *trots up and down aimlessly*)

BRISTOW (*moaning*). I knew it. I knew it.

JOHN (*wildly*). Stop it.

BRISTOW. I knew it. I—kn —

JOHN (*roaring*). Stop it!

BRISTOW (*with final moan*). O-oh!

ENTER LAVINIA, ESTHER *and* PAUL C. D.

LAVINIA. Aren't we ever going to start? What are you doing?

PAUL. We've had to send the Smiths ahead.

JOHN. Hush! (*Something in his tone paralyzes them.*
Pause)

LAVINIA (*in a whisper*). What is it, Uncle John?

JOHN. They've gone—eloped!

LAVINIA. No-o!

PAUL. But I saw them around here just ten minutes ago.

BRISTOW (*still trotting*). A lot can happen in ten minutes.

JOHN (*taking up telephone*). Then it's not too late.

LAVINIA (*running about wildly*). For heaven's sake! Can't somebody stop them?

JOHN (*in the transmitter*). Hulloo! Hulloo! HULL-LOA! CENTRAL!

LAVINIA. Oh dear—oh dear—oh dear!

JOHN. Hulloo. Police department. Yes? Yes? Police department? Good lord! No, I don't want information. I asked for the police. (*To others*) Get the motor!

PAUL. Ah, the motor! [EXITS C. D. *running*

LAVINIA (*calling after him*). Tell him to go to the station first.

JOHN (*at 'phone, groaning*). I can't get anyone. (*Hangs up receiver*) Paul.

ESTHER. He's gone. Oh, what can I do? (*She is anxious to do something*)

JOHN (*to LAVINIA*). Will he send both motors?

ESTHER. Yes—yes!

LAVINIA. One on the Wessex road.

BRISTOW (*who has never for an instant ceased his trotting*). Oh dear—dear—dear!

LAVINIA (*running to JOHN*). Oh Uncle John, please do something.

JOHN. What more can I do?

LAVINIA. You might—you might—Oh, I don't know.
(*Goes to window R.*)

ENTER PAUL C. D.

PAUL. They've started—both motors.

ESTHER. Did you send one on the Wessex Road?

JOHN (*pulling bell cord*). There's Susan!

BRISTOW (*still trotting*). Oh—oh—oh!

LAVINIA. Susan—of course!

ESTHER. Perhaps she's gone with them. She's—
she's indispensable, isn't she?

ENTER SUSAN D. L. *They all pounce on her.*

BRISTOW. Answer us!

SUSAN. What, sir? (*They all speak at once*)

JOHN. Where is Mrs. Manners gone? Do you know?

LAVINIA. Did my aunt leave a message?

ESTHER. How long has she been gone?

BRISTOW (*after the avalanche, before SUSAN has had time to answer*). For heaven's sake, girl, speak up.

SUSAN (*finding a voice at last*). I ain't never been spoke to like this and if you can't be decent I'm through!

JOHN (*to others*). Be quiet. You'll get no satisfaction this way. (*To SUSAN*) Tell us, do you know where Mrs. Manners has gone?

SUSAN (*sulkily*). The last I saw of her was here.

JOHN. Where?

SUSAN. In this room.

JOHN. What was she doing?

SUSAN. Sleeping! (*They exchange glances*)

JOHN. Sleeping, eh?

SUSAN. Yes, sir. It was about an hour ago.

BRISTOW (*snorting*). A carefully prepared bluff.

SUSAN (*forgetting herself*). It wasn't no bluff, sir. I'd guess you'd have known it if you tried to wake her. She was that tired she never even rolled over but said to me, she did—"Susan, for twenty years I've been a slave to manicurists, masseuses, hair-dressers ——"

JOHN (*excitedly*). Yes—yes, but that doesn't matter! What I want to know is ——

SUSAN (*indignantly*). I quit. (*Turns to L.*)

JOHN (*delaying her*). But you don't understand. Mrs. Manners has cloped with Mr. Carteret and ——

SUSAN (*genuinely surprised*). She ain't, has she?

JOHN. And we're trying to locate them with your help.

SUSAN. Well, I've told you all I know and that is she was sleeping.

ESTHER. It was an hour ago?

SUSAN. Yes, miss.

LAVINIA. How was she dressed?

SUSAN. Beautiful—except her shoes was off.

JOHN. That's all, Susan. You may go.

[EXIT SUSAN D. L.]

ESTHER. Perhaps she hasn't left the house.

BRISTOW (*who has begun his trotting again*). Ah!!

LAVINIA. She couldn't have had time. And then we were all out there talking.

JOHN. She has had time. (*PAUL goes to window*)

BRISTOW. Ah!!

PAUL (*looking out*). The car is coming back. (*All hurry to window*)

LAVINIA. Anyone in it?

JOHN. Which car?

ESTHER. The car that went to the station.

LAVINIA. That's funny. Here comes another.

PAUL. The Sedan.

JOHN. The devil. I'll try the police again. (*Goes to telephone, the rest following close at his heels, all except BRISTOW, who continues his trotting. Before he has taken down the receiver* MARY ENTERS C. D.)

MARY. What—what is it? (*She feels a premonition of what has happened*)

PAUL. They have gone!

LAVINIA. Mary! Listen!

BRISTOW. My dear—oh dear—dear—dear!

JOHN. Mary, your aunt ——

MARY (*going DOWN to JOHN*). I can't hear you. What is it, Uncle John?

JOHN (*hating to say it*). Aunt Abigail! She's eloped with Steve! (MARY *stares stupidly without a sound*. JOHN *goes close to her*) Don't you understand? Steve and your aunt have eloped! (MARY *falls back unconscious in JOHN'S arms*. He places her on day-bed, the others crowding around, wringing their hands. Everybody speaks at the top of his voice)

PAUL. Where's my First Aid Book? She's fainted. What do we do in a case like this? You ought to know, Vinny. Don't you rub her hands? Loosen her hair or something? Pump her arms. We ought to have a barrel to roll her on!

LAVINIA. Someone—get some water. It's water we want. Where's Susan? SUSAN! (SUSAN *appears at D. L. and rushes over to help*) Some water, Susan.

SUSAN (*weeping*). Oh, she's fainted, the poor dear's fainted!

[EXITS D. L.]

BRISTOW (*between his teeth*). The shock has killed her.

JOHN. Hush!

LAVINIA (*rubbing MARY'S wrists*). Don't be an idiot! (MARY *opens her eyes*)

JOHN. She's coming to. She'll be all right!

ENTER SUSAN D. L., *with glass of water*.

SUSAN. The poor dear—the poor dear. (All try to administer water to MARY'S forehead. SUSAN is most excited of all)

JOHN. There—there, that will do, Susan. You may go!

[EXIT SUSAN D. L., *reluctantly*]

BRISTOW. Oh dear—dear—dear!

LAVINIA (*has been rubbing MARY'S wrists, stops a moment*). Mary, tell me you're all right, aren't you?

PAUL. Keep on rubbing her wrists!

ESTHER. Not so hard—Vinny!

PAUL. Don't quit. She—she might go off again.

BRISTOW. Oh dear—dear—dear! (*The noise rises to a terrific crescendo, in the midst of which* MRS. MANNERS ENTERS C. D. *She creates the most profound impression. Everyone stops what he is doing and stares at her utterly aghast. MARY sits up and stares, perhaps the most bewildered of all*)

MARY (*faintly*). Aunt!

MRS. MANNERS (*wearily*). Oh Daniel, dear Daniel, if you still love this poor old lady, come and take her and don't ever let her grow young again. (*Goes to him and with a moan of delight he takes her in his arms*)

BRISTOW. Abigail!

MRS. MANNERS (*from BRISTOW'S shoulder*). I'm so deathly sick of trying to be girlish—of worrying about my complexion—of sitting in a favorable light—of wasting hours with masseuses and hair-dressers! I'm old! I'm fifty—and I hope I look it. I'm worn out from so much excitement. I'm going to get a cat and a wing-chair and settle down. (*Weeps a little*)

BRISTOW. Abigail, we have found "happiness at last." This is the happiest moment of my life!

MRS. MANNERS (*drawing away from him gently*). Don't be absurd, you old silly. I know better, but you may say it again if you like.

BRISTOW (*kissing her gently*). It is the happiest moment of my life.

JOHN (*who has waited long enough*). Abigail—explain yourself.

MRS. MANNERS (*going DOWN stage*). There is really nothing to explain. I went upstairs to get ready to elope and I—well, I fell asleep over my make-up. (*Everyone laughs*) I was so tired!

BRISTOW. Poor dear.

JOHN. But Steve? Where is Steve?

MRS. MANNERS. I'm sure I don't know. Someone will have to find him and explain. (ENTER CARTERET C. D. *He looks bewildered*) Here he is now. (*Goes to him*) Steve, dear, I'm sorry but I couldn't help it. I fell asleep.

CARTERET. My dear Mrs. Manners, I forgive you. I—I—to tell the truth, I was a bit fagged and I—I fell asleep too.

MARY (*rising*). Steve!

CARTERET (*going to her*). Mary! (PAUL and LAVINIA *show by pantomime that all is well with them. The rest talk together*)

MARY. The winds of doom seem to have blown away for us, Steve dear, and we have found happiness at last! (STEVE *smiles and takes her hand. 'Phone rings violently*)

JOHN (*answering*). Hulloo! Yes! Police department? Hello—no! We don't need you now!

ALL. For we have found "Happiness at Last."

QUICK CURTAIN

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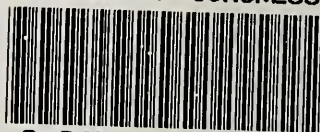
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